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Before the Appropriations Committee

***In Support of* HR 11 and SR 12: RESOLUTION PROPOSING APPROVAL OF AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT AND THE STATE EMPLOYEES BARGAINING AGENT COALITION (SEBAC)**

Good Morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee. My name is Lisa Avery, I live in Griswold, CT, and I work for DMHAS as a Registered Nurse for the South East Mental Health Authority (SEMHA). I have been a Registered Nurse for 17 years and I come before you today to testify in support of House Resolution 11 and Senate Resolution 12.

At SEMHA we provide services to individuals 18 and older, who struggle with mental health and substance use disorders in New London County and its surrounding towns. Those services include case management, outpatient services, behavioral health services, crisis intervention, residential care, and forensics services. The care we provide is critical to the stabilization and progression of the most vulnerable individuals within our communities. We are the foundation of mental health services in the community and for many the only support to aid them. The importance of the services we provide are not only essential for the individuals that we serve, but are inherently indispensable to the community agencies that benefit from our programs.

The work we do deters multiple emergency room visits, reduces overcapacity in our homeless shelters, reduces recidivism in the correctional system, and improves the safety and quality of life for our clients. The state has an obligation to protect this population who can find themselves, sleeping in the street, panhandling for survival, or subject to violence, hopelessness, and relapse.

As multiple crises intertwine during this unprecedented moment in history, working people in Connecticut—black, brown, and white—are struggling for their very survival. We have to meet the needs of the times. This contract would allow us to expand access to services for those who are struggling and recruit and retain the workforce needed to really invest in our public health system.

Thank you for your time.